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FILE ONLY

Administration shapes new plan to cut leaks of official secrets

Could include new FBI unit, more lie tests, cutting classified data

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Washington

The Reagan administration's latest proposal to plug leaks of sensitive information to the American press was itself leaked to selected news organizations.

But administration officials are not complaining about that leak.

According to published reports, a proposed plan to stop the unauthorized flow of classified information to the press has been drawn up by administration intelligence officials for consideration by the National Security Council.

When contacted for additional details about the White House plan, however, a National Security Council spokesman said it is "classified" and could not be discussed.

Questioned about the published stories, the spokesman acknowledged that the information was released during private briefings for certain reporters.

Was this an actual "leak," or simply a private press conference?

"The bulk of classified material leaked to the public is done intentionally by high-level government officials," says Robert Lewis, national president of the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi.

"Information is power and those who are possessing information use it for their own ends," says William Burleigh, who chairs the Freedom of Information Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

Be that as it may, the Reagan administration, like most other recent administrations of both parties, contends that United States national security has been repeatedly jeopardized by unauthorized leaks of secret information.

It is with this viewpoint that the White House is waging its most recent battle to tighten its control over the outflow of government information to members of the public and press.

According to the selectively released information, the administration is considering a two-pronged crackdown against government leaks of classified informa-

tion. The plan would be aimed both at government workers prone to make such leaks and at members of the press who might publicize them.

Among the ideas said to be under consideration:

- Setting up a special unit at the Federal Bureau of Investigation to probe and plug leaks of classified information.
- Wider use of mandatory polygraph tests of government workers to determine the source of leaks and to deter others from making unauthorized disclosures.
- Reducing the volume of information classified as sensitive by the government, making it easier to protect a smaller number of actual secrets.
- Reducing the number of government employees cleared to handle government secrets.

At the same time, Central Intelligence Agency Director William J. Casey is pursuing a high-profile policy of threatening to prosecute American news organizations for publishing or broadcasting leaked information about United States communications intelligence capabilities.

The Justice Department is reviewing a recent NBC News report to determine if it violated a 1950 federal law forbidding disclosure of information about the US government's ability to intercept foreign communications and decipher codes. In addition, the CIA is reviewing a recent Washington Post article to determine whether the CIA will refer it to the Justice Department for possible prosecution under the same 1950 law.

Both NBC and Washington Post reports related to the pending spy case of Ronald W. Pelton, a former National Security Agency employee who is accused of selling US communications intelligence information to the Soviets. Testimony in Mr. Pelton's trial began Tuesday in a Baltimore federal court.

By putting the American press on notice that publishing certain leaks could result in federal charges against news organizations, the administration is hoping to emphasize that American reporters and editors have a responsibility to protect state secrets rather than simply to print sensitive information at will.

Members of the press insist that news organizations would not knowingly publi-

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cize information that might hurt the safety and security of the nation.

"We recognize that there are such things as state secrets," says Mr. Burleigh of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. "I know an awful lot of newspaper men and women. They are patriotic. They would not do anything deliberately inimical to the interests of our society."

"I think the administration is exhibiting hypersensitivity in this," says Philip Robbins, chairman of the Journalism Department at George Washington University.